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STATE HISTORY I

IN the pageant of the arts and sciences the local historian does not figure brightly. He is tolerated only as a poor relation of the mighty scholars who chronicle the deeds of parliaments and armies, for it seems clear that since the whole is greater than the part, he who writes of one small section cannot be as great as one who writes of nations and the world. Now and then there is a flash of sympathy for some Old Mortality chiseling afresh the humble epitaphs of years gone by, but he is generally dismissed with something of contempt as an antiquarian, uncritical and queer, in whose myopic vision perspective has no part, and who painfully works out a futile record of the insignificant. If there is a spectacle more dreary to the average man than one of these, it is a number of them gathered for mutual congratulation as a local historical society, for it is charged that their interest in the past is incident to genealogy, which itself grows out of snobbishness and vanity.

Such is the common understanding and the common prejudice, and it is wrong. Many will remember that the local history of the United States has found a place in universities since the days forty years ago when Herbert Baxter Adams began to publish at Johns Hopkins the product of his seminar. The *American Commonwealths* followed shortly after, and in this enterprise some distinguished scholars were enlisted, Alexander Johnston, Shaler, Cooley, Royce, and others, though it might be remarked in no spirit of detraction that these early volumes seldom represented the main interest of their authors' scholarship. Mr. H. H. Bancroft's wholesale history of the western coast found no imitators. Such serious local study as was carried forward in the older states generally concerned itself with the colonial period, for not only had the somewhat distant past a stronger fascination, but in America where the earliest records are so full it is fatally easy to begin at the beginning and write forever on the opening paragraph. Respectable state history,

full and balanced, could not be written without a broad basis of monographic works on localities and stocks, such as the universities and societies were slowly bringing forth.

Yet local history is a rewarding study. If through a prank of fate we might some day have over us, besides the food and fuel controllers of recent memory, a high director of our social policy, he might compel us to consider it. We are still, as the traveler John Bristed said a hundred years ago, the most "locomotive people" on the face of the earth, and while perhaps there is some economic gain in living here today and there tomorrow there is a moral sacrifice of good home sentiment. "To astract the mind from all local emotion", wrote Dr. Johnson, "would be impossible, if it were endeavored, and would be foolish, if it were possible." The study of the multifarious records of the valley where we come to live must in some degree enrich the associations of the hearthstone so as to make life more interesting and lovely; the tales of a grandfather that set forth its heroic and picturesque traditions are not to be despised by the historian, provided that the touch of truth has marked them. In local history the citizen finds use, in that it can reveal the origins and growth, and thus the nature, of the institutions and the social groupings with which he has to dwell and deal. Not many of us are called to build great empires or to wield the mighty forces of the world; in the humble occasions of the common life we need to know our neighbors and the special heritage we share, so that our labors for improvement, if and when we make them, may grow out of knowledge.

But in this study there is likewise scientific value, for in the smaller field of vision we can sometimes see the ordinary undistinguished individual in his relation to society and the little human group in its relation to the soil, the climate and the contour of the land. To say that the local historian is the microscopist of the body politic who discerns the structural relations of the man-cells, would perhaps suggest some false deductions; few historians would be as much impressed with biological analogies as Hobbes or Spencer. But by his labor, like the scientific specialist, he adds his item to the general

store of knowledge. If thought through with industry and sympathy and wisdom there might result from it a masterpiece as authentic as a history of the world. As the Reverend Gilbert White could win a universal gratitude with the *Natural History of Selborne*, so another with as clear a head and great a heart might do likewise with the human history of that same small Hampshire village. It was considerations such as these, no doubt, that led Dr. Jameson to say so justly, "Local history is national history locally exemplified." A recent writer, Professor F. M. Fling, has denounced this piling up of instances from which to generalize: "If we are interested", he declares, "in what past social facts have in common, in the way in which social facts repeat themselves, if our purpose is for generalization, or laws concerning social activities . . . the result of our work is sociology, not history." But there are many scholars who are under a concern to understand the American spirit; and without making themselves ridiculous with Bucklean laws, they will, no doubt, go on comparing as many of these records as they find to see how man has lived his life in our various environments; the study of local history may open up the past to modern methods of survey, and bring to light the customary facts of daily life which so easily escape the rolls and registers. It binds the speculative reason close to the concrete. If this be sociology, make the most of it.

Professor F. J. Turner has called attention to the need of studying our history by sections, but maintains that geographic units—river-valleys, plains, peninsulas—should be taken as the bases, for these determine the course and character of settlement. The political divisions known as states, oftentimes laid out in straight lines by surveyors, he remarks, are generally artificial and do not mark off coherent social groups. Scores of good examples could be given to support his main contention that culture masses flow and settle without regard to the political map, but he would, no doubt, readily admit that the study of state history must precede or at least accompany these researches, as it is in the action of the state that the voice of the people has found political expression. Through the constitutions, laws and practices of states, we learn much of the

thought of citizens, though by no means all, so that the state forms a convenient unit to consider. By comparing the internal development of nearby states we come to some approximation of the ideas and habits of a larger section; the study of sectionalism within the states as expressed in elections and debates may reveal the many groups crossed by state boundaries. Thus by widening or narrowing our range of vision we come through state history back to river-valleys and the like.

The American history that "every school boy knows" is the history of Congress and the Presidents with some attention to the generals and a hasty paragraph or two upon the opening of the West. The writers are particular enough about each separate colony before the spring of 1775, indeed the text-books have quite generally neglected to point out the features common to them all. But when Washington has taken up his sword beneath the Cambridge elm, or at least when he has taken the presidential oath in New York City, all attention is suddenly refocused, first on Philadelphia for a few years and then for all time on the District of Columbia. The result is strange distortion. Foreign affairs, the conduct of the territories (especially with reference to slavery), debates upon the tariff, have been reviewed with a laborious minuteness; the reader comes to think, for instance, that from 1789 to 1876 the ordinary citizen's table talk must have been almost exclusively devoted to the assertion and the challenge of the federal authority over states. What constitutes a large and interesting part of the history of European countries somehow got left out. The suffrage, the guaranties to labor, the organization and control of business, canals and highways, the relations between church and state, education, crime and punishment, the mandates of the public conscience in respect to liquor, lotteries and sport, and other concerns of every individual, are matters of state legislation; even the tariff, in the close view, though they laughed at General Hancock for saying it, is in truth a local issue.

As to the dignity that comes from people, wealth and space, our states cannot be overlooked as unimportant subdivisions. It would take three Denmarks to compare with Pennsylvania in size and population; California outmatches Norway by a quarter

according to these standards, without considering the superiority in wealth; Ohio has more people than Australia; Texas more than Ireland, while eight Emerald Isles could be packed within its borders. Certainly communities of this importance deserve the serious attention of historians, when the *Victoria History of the Counties of England*, planned and executed with the best ideals of scholarship, can allot eight huge volumes to Lancaster alone. But quite apart from what they may demand for their own sake, the student of our federal politics cannot neglect the states. Great careers are not begun in Washington; for the first phase of the national leader we must search the records of his state to find the interaction of his personality and his environment in the formative years of youth and early manhood. How can one understand Calhoun's extraordinary theory of concurrent majorities without knowing of the compromise of 1808 in South Carolina? Or Roosevelt's view of the judiciary in 1912 without referring to the contests in the New York legislature thirty years before? National movements oftentimes grow out of situations in some state or states. How can one comprehend the Free Soil Party without a knowledge of the rupture in the Regency at Albany? Or the repeal of the Missouri Compromise without that of the Atchison and Benton wars at home? Even our foreign relations are affected by conditions in the states; the treaty with England in 1842, the Chinese Exclusion Bill, the policy toward Mexico, have not proceeded solely from discussions on the banks of the Potomac. The *Congressional Record* requires annotation from the local papers. One may write the history of England from the point of view of London and so perhaps of France from Paris, but one cannot write the history of the United States, as Von Holst, for one example, tried to do, entirely from Washington.

If this is true of politics it is much more true of custom and opinion. One must have a thoroughgoing knowledge of the local tradition, which broods as the influence of yesterday over the community life, constantly confirming the old sanctions and compelling strangers to respect them or exert a mighty energy in opposition. In these concerns especially the historian must not generalize too hastily, but seek to sense the peculiar culture

of each section in times past before he can trace by what processes of syncretism a general American taste has been developed—and then he may discover that for better or worse we have been agreed on but a few fundamental things. In different places words have had a different meaning; in some localities temperance in intoxicating liquors has meant a total abstinence, in others a moderate and occasional indulgence, and in still others merely the condition of being less drunk; the “sphere of woman” has varied with the latitude and longitude, and likewise the observance of the Sabbath, the zeal for schools, the sufferance of a family aristocracy, and many other matters. Only by studying local history can we understand how these traditions have been transplanted and the physical conditions that have made it possible. Eli Thayer could carry New-Englandism out to central Kansas, but it changed a bit. What would have been the issue if, according to another plan he recommended, he had carried it into Virginia. Those Puritan saints who settled on the shores and hills of Massachusetts and Connecticut could make a mighty effort toward a perfect Christian commonwealth, but not so those who went to Providence Island in the Caribbean Sea.

In the last two decades, state and local histories, it is true, have fallen from the presses every year, but their bulk has been more striking than their substance. With steel engravings at a hundred dollars and half-tones at half price, one easily bought what fame they could furnish. Lee's *New Jersey*, Lyman's *Oregon*, Gue's *Iowa*, and Morgan's *Connecticut*, though made to sell, were of a somewhat better order, while Randall and Ryan's six sumptuous volumes on Ohio were even more ambitious in appearance and certainly more valuable in text. But these books were all exasperating to the scholar: they had no notes or bibliography to aid in more research; they included anecdotes and legends of a doubtful authenticity; they tapered badly in the nineteenth century; and, saving Dr. Randall from the gentle malediction, one can say that their authors made but little contribution to American history. The later volumes of the *Commonwealths* improved upon their predecessors, but, with their limits of space, most of them were sketchy. Sometimes

a work appeared revealing artistry as well as insight, like Colonel Alexander's history of New York State, and in at least two cases histories that commanded great respect for their extent and erudition, Alcée Fortier's *Louisiana* and Houck's five volumes on *Missouri*. But with the growth of state and sectional societies as well as university research through the West and South, it was expected that the historians of those regions would develop and present their product according to the highest standards of the guild.

According to the *Handbook of Learned Societies* issued by the Carnegie Institution, there are a great number of such devoted to the study of history. In the case of many the adjective is somewhat inappropriate, but for the most part their purposes are fine and wholesome; one must not contrast them with perfection, but rather with a void. In Massachusetts alone, there are a hundred, more or less, with at least one local society, the Essex Institute, standing as a model for energetic and discriminating publication; the Historical and the Colonial Societies of Massachusetts are academies in the best sense, the publications of the former, which is thus older by a century, forming a small library in themselves. Throughout the East to join an historical society has too often been a gesture of social aspiration; names were added, but such infusion never stayed the course of dry rot. Too often, it is true, their historical interests did not come nearer than the eighteenth century, and though much ore remains unmined in this older field, there has been a loss for this self-limitation. But they have influenced the states to better care of archives, have by assiduous collection saved much source-material from loss, and have made much available for all time by publication. In Pennsylvania, especially, have local societies made their contribution: those of Lancaster county, the Wyoming valley and the Pennsylvania Germans, having each a score or more of volumes to their credit, while the state society in Philadelphia, with its large building, its museum, its hundreds of volumes of bound manuscript material, its excellent magazine, has been a stimulus to scholarship past all calculation. The library and cabinets of many of the eastern societies are comfortably housed in monumental buildings,

as in New York and Baltimore, or in old mansions of intrinsic interest, as the war-time home of the Lees in Richmond, where the Virginia society is domiciled.

Generally speaking, in this section of the country the societies have been entirely self-supporting in all of their activities, receiving nothing from the state, though some exceptions may be noted. The society of New Jersey, after a long and arduous campaign, induced the state to provide for the publication of its colonial archives, and was itself appointed as the agency of their production, with a suitable appropriation year by year; the Maryland society, and for a time that of New Hampshire, have rendered similar service, while that of Maine has had a subsidy for the editing and printing of the twenty volumes of the Baxter manuscripts which have so far appeared. South of the Potomac there has lately been displayed the energy and intelligence in historical publication that has characterized the "new South" in many of its enterprises. In 1903, about the time when Georgia, under ex-Governor Candler, began her splendid feat of issuing nearly thirty portly volumes in six years—North Carolina created her historical commission to collect or copy all important source-material relating to the old "North State", publish with proper editorial aid as much as possible of archives and monographs, diffuse historical information broadly through the commonwealth and commemorate with adequate monuments the storied places of her history. The success of this commission under its secretary, R. D. W. Connor, has been so notable that some other states, for example, Michigan, have adopted it. Alabama in 1901 set up its State Department of History and Archives, dividing labor with the state association, a plan adopted the next year by her neighbor Mississippi and in 1904 indorsed by the American Historical Association. Here we see the state and interested citizens in a noble partnership to discover and present historical truth. But it is in the Middle West that we shall find the best example of such enterprise.

In the Mississippi valley there are of course some important organizations engaged in historical research and publication, which receive no tribute from the taxpayer, like the Filson

Club of Kentucky, the three large associations in Ohio, and everywhere a host of those designed to serve their small localities, but nearly all the state societies have a governmental subsidy and are considered trustees of the public. In Iowa, indeed, where there is a historical department which has its library, museum, and permanent staff exactly like the state society, the latter has its annual appropriation notwithstanding; the rivalry between the two, it may be said, produces a storm of publication that must astound the ordinary citizen. The output of the society, more or less simultaneous, includes a quarterly journal, a monthly magazine, independent series of public archives, biography, economic history, social history, applied history, the chronicles of the world war, besides miscellaneous publications and bulletins of information. And under the superintendence of Benjamin F. Shambaugh high qualitative standards are not sacrificed to needs of mass production. It must be said in partial explanation, that here, as in a number of the western states, there is a close connection with the state university, in whose buildings it is housed, and that we see at work the faculty of history and political science and its graduate students, as well as the society's own paid assistants and its general membership—a university extension in the cause of history.

There is a similar relation in Nebraska, Texas, Washington, North Dakota, and in Missouri, where the society and its superintendent are given room in the university library. In Indiana, Dr. Esarey, whose interest in state history is illustrated in his excellent volumes recently completed, has contributed to bring the association nearer to the university, which now issues the state historical magazine; the state commission of Michigan now has a university series inaugurated by a full and scholarly dissertation on the economic and social beginnings of the state, by Dr. George N. Fuller, the secretary of the commission and the society. In Minnesota there are relations with the university and the state, but the association does not have to beg space in college halls or in the attic of the capitol. Housed in its new half-million-dollar building, and enjoying an annual income well over thirty thousand dollars from the state and private gifts, it not only gathers newspapers from all the counties, buys material

to make its collection on genealogy and the Scandinavian-Americans the most notable in the country, and publishes selections from its sources, but under the direction of its superintendent, Professor Solon J. Buck, it is sending its field agents to survey localities to see how valuable historical matter may be found and kept, for example the full record of each town's activities as affected by the world war. Together with the historical agencies of five other northwestern states the society shares the cost and benefit of a calendar now being made of all manuscripts in Washington that bear upon the history of that region. It stimulates the interest of the schools in local history, but in this respect it is not distinguished from the other western state societies and those of the counties. A news item of the current year may serve as an illustration as it shows the fruit of such endeavors in another state:

School children of McLean County, North Dakota, will finance the purchase of the site of Fort Mandan where Captain Meriwether Lewis and William Clark spent the historic winter of 1804-5 with their expedition to the Pacific Coast. Each school will stage a dramatization of the story as furnished by the County Superintendent of Schools, the receipts to be used to cover the purchase, and the children will then give the site to the State for a State Park.

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin is usually acknowledged as approaching nearest to the ideal institution for encouraging the development and understanding of local history. Most that has been claimed for others here applies with greater force. Its quarters are extensive and expensive beyond those of its neighbor in St. Paul; its income is the largest in the country, as are its library and its faculty of administrative officers and research associates. Upon these last, of course, is settled much of the labor and the credit of the society's achievement; one knows not whether they should best be likened to the prebendaries of a collegiate chapter or the staff of professional coaches of a great amateur team, for while they do the offices of custody, research and publication, they stimulate and counsel the host of citizens who at one time or another discover a taste for historical investigation. The mutual aid of such

permanent leaders, the body of enthusiastic laymen who make up the membership of the society together with their numerous allies throughout the local organizations, and the university, all in part sustained and superintended by the state—this seems, where it is possible, to be the most promising means of fostering a historical consciousness in a community.¹ Dr. Lyman C. Draper was the superintendent from 1854 to 1886, single-purposed as a Jesuit, taking little for himself, but with persuasive zeal enlisting the support of legislators and philanthropists, and with wise discrimination building up the great collection of manuscripts, maps, books and newspapers; Thwaites, for twenty-seven years, and since then Quaife and Schafer, have enriched this library, until today many a historian by traveling thousands of miles to Madison can study the history of his own section better than he can at home.

In Ohio they send out their expeditions to measure mounds built by the early neolithic men; in New York they send field experts to identify the camp-sites of the Revolution by exhuming buttons dropped long years ago from coats of blue or scarlet. But in Wisconsin, as in the farther West, they search for the memorabilia of the pioneer. Twenty years ago at the dedication of the splendid home of the society, there stood by many who had been present at Wisconsin's birth some sixty years before. Materials are at hand to trace the whole history of a commonwealth, how one by one and group by group the wagons of the emigrant were driven through the woods and streams and over the vast sea-like prairies to the solitude of the middle border, and how by dint of hard toil, shrewd thought and suffering which disheartened many, intervals, "oak openings" and rolling plains were made the homes of civilization, with its schools and churches, mills and markets. This is a

¹ Men and women who have at once the conscience of the scholar and the communicable enthusiasm of the organizer are rare, and good editors have in several states been powerless to increase the number and spirit of their membership. State support has been alleged to put a damper upon spontaneity; it also sometimes prevents a society saying and printing what it believes to be the truth, because of political considerations. The New York State Historical Association is a good example of a society which leaves the field of considerable publication to the state department, and successfully encourages the study of history and preserves its memorials.

noble theme and one that strikes quick to the heart of the pioneer's descendant. Hundreds of personal accounts have been gathered and published by the various organizations of the state, but this will not satisfy. The society now purposes to free itself from a reliance on chance data and in the new synthetic method which history has borrowed from the other sciences, and which must gratify the shade of Francis Bacon, it sets out to find as near the full truth as can result from human effort. It has distributed blanks with which it hopes to reach the owners of farm homesteads, asking for a description of the land according to government sections and lots, the name of the maker of the farm, the date at which ownership began, the origin of title as from the federal government, the state or a certain land speculator, the date of settlement with some contemporary proof or the testimony of survivors acquainted with the facts, the name of the present owner, a sketch of the pioneer with portrait if available, and photographs and description of the farm today. School teachers, high school pupils and others all over the state are being enrolled to interview pioneers and to aid in this historical census, and qualified students to gather certain collateral kinds of facts from the local records of churches, lodges, mercantile establishments and manufactories. The society is organizing a special salaried field service to direct this vast inquest, and by means of addresses and printed explanations is making clear the details of its method.

There exist for most Wisconsin counties for the period about 1870, maps and plat books giving the farmers' names and limits of their holdings, and a full record of a similar kind for 1915. If by a vast geo-social survey the society can produce the same for the basic forties, supplementing as they can the surveyors' marginal description of the original country as they laid out the townships, and using the record of the government sales, federal and state, to speculators or home-builders, there will be material for comparison. This will yield results on the changing size of farms, the shift of population and the displacement of Americans by immigrants from Europe. It will be used by the advanced historical students at the university in the preparation of monographs which the society now plans to

publish, along with successive portions of the great body of data issued by towns and groups of towns. The topographical maps of the geological survey, whenever available, and the state soil maps of the various sections will be published for correlation. Supplementary studies of agriculture, manufactures, education, morals, politics, religion and public improvements will proceed in type townships under the local societies working along a standard method furnished from Madison.

The social historian [writes the superintendent, Dr. Schafer] needs to know in detail, at least for typical areas, the conditions under which the several classes of lands were occupied and the types of settlers who occupied them. He needs to know both how the settlers dealt with the land under varying circumstances and how the land reacted upon the settlers economically and socially. Numerous special studies interpretative of Wisconsin and of American history wait upon the preparation of such a working basis as we have proposed.

He prints a fragment of a letter from Professor F. J. Turner, which illustrates the prophetic enterprise of that pioneer in the scientific history of pioneers:

I should make in selected areas, detailed study of the correlation between party votes, by precincts, wards, etc., soils, nationalities and state-origins of the voter, assesment rolls, denominational groups, illiteracy, etc. What kind of people tend to be Whigs, what Democrats, Abolitionists, etc.? This can be ascertained by such studies, and it would be the first time such correlations have been worked out on any considerable scale.

Here is a scheme, whose plain recital needs no ornament to stir the imagination. Wisconsin's Domesday Book is not to be completed in a few months; it is thought that twenty years may be consumed in so great an undertaking. It is the "Wisconsin idea" and practice to send the state to school in the various courses of human interest. One pauses to consider the effect of this survey upon the hundreds of thousands of people brought into contact with historical method, with its emphasis on accuracy of first-hand information as a basis for conclusions. Having contributed each his humble share to the massing of

the data, it may be safely said that they will read the resulting narratives with an understanding of what history means beyond that of any other people. Dr. Draper is reported to have traveled sixty thousand miles in search of historical material, on foot, on horseback, by stage, by lumber wagon, and by steamboat; now his society like the many-handed Vishnu reaches into every home, not for miscellaneous information, but for facts which fit together to make clear the truth. This state's activities are coordinated; one may speculate as to whether those of all the states could or should ever be organized together. The historical atlas now slowly under preparation by the Carnegie Institution seems a kind of harbinger of nation-wide surveys, but what the future may bring forth no man can say. We do know that a state has undertaken an unprecedented task. Schouler, Rhodes and H. H. Bancroft have left on record their opinion that a great historian must be rich in this world's wealth, for he must not only have leisure and books, but buy the services of others. There is still much truth in this, but they left out of reckoning the growth of universities with research professorships and seminary dissertations, institutions for investigation endowed by great philanthropists, the vast libraries with constantly enlarging manuscript and photostat collections, and especially the great cooperative effort of the people themselves. Skeptics may demur, for only the beginning has been made even in Wisconsin; but if this plan so heroically conceived should finally fail, its very bruited has enlarged the field of history.¹

DIXON RYAN FOX.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.

¹ The recent historical publications of Illinois will be the subject of a second and concluding article in the next number of the *POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY*.